

Musical Warfare

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Summary: AU. Cortana likes to play music for John. He likes to listen. Going through Halo 1,2,3 and 4 UPDATE: First Chapter removed. New 2nd Chap added. *First fic, Rating Jumps Around, Reviews make a happy fangirl, Criticism appreciated, Flames make S'mores*

1. Beautiful Place

So, Took out the old 1st chap. Felt like it didn't fit, right? Anyway, on with the story!

The Song for this Chapter is "Beautiful Place" by Good Charlotte.

I Own nothing, just borrowing.

Enjoy!

* * *

><p>It was... odd, to say the least.<p>

He wouldn't say that he disliked the feeling, it was actually nice having someone to talk to while there was nothing going on otherwise. She wasn't as bland as he thought she would be, actually she tended to force a conversation out of him every now and then. With everyone else, aside from Johnson and the few Spartans he called his friends, he was Chief, no small talk, no sarcastic remarks. She was a completely different entity. Where he was quiet and reserved, she was loud and opinionated. Her Remarks did manage to get a few chuckles out of him now and then, much to her endless satisfaction he'd bet. Having had his AI, Cortana, for a while now he felt they could actually be friends.

That was until she got bored however.

Cortana reminded him of a puppy in ways, enthusiastic and playful,

but utterly destructive when bored.

We Live in a beautiful place, let love take away all this pain...

Chief blinked, that was unexpected. Looking around he searched the hallway he was crammed into for speakers. Dodging some needler fire from a increasingly annoying grunt , Chief rolled out of cover to do a quick spray of magnum shot, effectively dispersing any remaining covenant in the hallway.

We wasted so many days, our hearts are as dark as the rain...

There! Where is that coming from?

Looking up, he moved to stand on his toes to inspect the walls, maybe a hidden speaker..? In a covenant base... playing earth...music? A wave of disbelief hit him as the improbability of the situation hit him.

"Trying to find secret sniper holes in the walls, Chief?" Crotona's melodious voice chimed.

She was amused.

He was about to snap off a reply, when a idea hit him.

"Cortana, do a scan for hidden speakers, voice communications... a human squad... anything" A lot of Marines liked to whisper that Spartans were crazy, he didn't want to believe that just yet.

He heard the distant buzzing of a scan starting up, and the Crotona's slightly confused voice.

"Anything specific Chief, or are the gunshots not loud enough for you?"

Stifling a grin Chief remained silent waiting the scan results.

After a few seconds, Cortana let out a muffled sigh,

"Nothing sounding any alarms, so what did you hear?"

Chief debated for a moment, then figured Cortana would be the only to not write him off as crazy, considering her personality.

"Just heard some... music I think, it's nothing."

If she wasn't in his head, he maybe, maybe, would have missed her slight change in tone.

"Oh? Music huh...?"

Stopping, and doing a quick check to make sure the halls were clear, Chief Pulled out the chip containing Cortana and fixed it with the most stern stare his visor could muster. Cortana appeared, hands behind her back with a barley concealed pure shit eating grin.

"What... are you doing" Chief pronounced slowly. he did NOT need his AI distracting him in the middle of a battle with music. He didn't even talk much during firefights for need to focus during the mission.

Cortana, for her part, managed to look sheepish, before flicking her 'hair' and fixing him with the same, if not less concealed, glare.

"Oh, so that's what it takes to get you to noticed a girl?"

Chief's eyes narrowed, attention? Really?

"You could just say you're bored-"

"And have you mute me? Not going through that one again, this way we can both enjoy a fight."

At this John nearly took off his helmet to glare at the AI, how could she make actively endangering the mission a joke?

"Mission first, then you can play music. On the pelican, by yourself. Silently." He wasn't being mean, he was being stern. He even 'nudged' her hologram with his finger to accent the amusement in his tone.

Cortana adopted a hurt look, but it quickly switched to one of triumph.

"But what if it helps the mission, what would you say to that?"

Mid turn, John was halfway to putting the chip back into his head when she spoke, now he was holding her at arms length, apprehensive.

"Explain." Came John's ridged reply.

Cortana smiled, a true warm smile that reminded him of Dr. Halsey oddly.

"It relaxes you, check your bio readings."

With that a window popped up on his screen, showing various readouts. Not really caring for the technical aspect of music, or the artistic one for that matter, John let the pros and cons of the situation fill his mind.

On the one hand, Cortana would be occupied and thus less likely to mess with him while during a mission on the other... well, he really couldn't see a downside, aside for the minor annoyance of having to listen to songs he didn't like.

Cortana, wanting a response, prompted him with a question.

"So what do you like Chief, anything specific?" With her hands on her hips and the way she was smiling at him, he could have sworn she was trying to seduce him with music. Hilarious.

Chief took a steady breath, he's probably surprise Cortana with this

one.

"I've... never listened to music. I don't know what I like..."

Cortana was silent for a moment longer then she needed to, and looking up, Chief saw why. She was covering her face and her shoulders were shaking with silent laughter.

John huffed in fake agitation, adopting a annoyed tone while lighting tapping her chip into his helmet

"That's the last time I tell you something personal, Cortana." He said with a grin of amusement.

"I'm sorry but, really Chief? How? Everyone listens to music. No favorites?" Cortana chided with a burst of warmth.

His mood instantly soured, and she felt the change. Starting off down the hallway again, he snatched the needler from the previously downed grunt and reloaded it before answering.

"I didn't have time... My life isn't what you would call easy going, Cortana."

He sighed as he put a few needle spikes into the back a elite to drop its shields. Cortana remained silent, letting him finish his work methodically. How many Lives has he ended today?

" I wouldn't know how to relax if I could" Chief amended with a broken sigh. And today started off so well...

Cortana responded with another burst of warmth, and her voice sounded like she was trying very hard to keep from succumbing to his downed mood.

"That's what I'm here for Chief, keep you sane and happy. A little music couldn't hurt-

He didn't miss the note of hope in her voice when she added

-Could It?"

He couldn't turn her down turn her down with that voice now could he.

"I suppose it couldn't... how about the one you were playing before?"

If he was going to entertain her, he might as well go all the way, and with the wave of pure joy he got from her, he was sure this would be worth it.

"Starting it up from the beginning Chief." Cortana was practically bouncing with joy over her victory Chief noted with a concealed smirk.

Mother can we start over? I wanna be the boy I was back then. Before the world came, and made me colder. I wanna feel the way I did back then... With love in my heart...

Ducking Behind a pillar, Chief listened to the song Cortana had picked, mentally scanning for enemies while noting the lyrics. They were strangely fitting, or at least familiar.

Sad, He thought as he crouched over a fallen enemy for ammo, this song was sad.

We live in a beautiful place, let love take away all this pain. We live in a beautiful place, we wasted so many days, Our hearts are as dark as the rain. We live in a beautiful place...

Looking around he saw only the bodies of fallen marines, aliens, and a few weapons laying haphazardly across the floor. He was the only one left. Again. The coldness in the air stung him through his suit.

He couldn't help but mutter about the nonexistent beauty surrounding him.

"You don't think that do you, Chief?" Came Cortana's quiet question

Rescanning the scene, Chief couldn't help but see all the pain there.

_Father, can we start over? Take me to the places that we lived, before the days came and made us older
>I wanna feel the way I did back then, before my heart grew cold...

"I do."

The Feeling of hope that filled his Ai companion was surprising to him, and he couldn't seem to shake the felling that she wanted him to be a bit less depressing.

"Well come on Chief, we can't have the luckiest Spartan in the Universe feeling so down." Cortana's playful tone echoed thru his mind, bouncing off the images of pain until there was just him and her.

Chief ignored the grip she had on his feelings for the moment, and instead focused on her statement.

"And why is that, if you don't mind me asking, that I'm lucky?" As hard as he tried, he didn't have the power to keep his mood from being lifted from her next words

Our hearts are as dark as the rain, our hearts are as dark as the rain. It's a beautiful place if we make it, it's a beautiful place to be wasted, don't you know.

"Because you have me, John"

That, combined with the song made him that much more hopeful towards his life. Cortana felt his mood change and instantly he could almost see her smug expression.

"Don't push it, I still don't know what music I like you know" John

said teasingly as her leaned into another corridor, this one filled with Jackals. As he ducked behind a door to avoid the incoming shots, Cortana's laugh filtered thru his helmet, pulling another grin out of him.

"Well then, we have a whole forever to figure it out, so how's about we run thru my playlists and find out?"

We live in a beautiful place, let love take away all this pain, we live in a beautiful place...

Letting the last few notes of the song drift thru his helmet, the Master Chief reloaded his needler and prepared to jump out of cover.

Cortana knew the answer before he said it, and already was looking for new songs by the time he said it.

"I'd love to."

2. Collide

Song for this one is Collide by Howie Day, and Gangnam style (tho less so) by PSY. 1000 Thanks for reading!

* * *

><p>Seeing The Master Chief, a Spartan, outright losing it during a firefight was not something the marines expected to see today. They didn't expect him to be completely stoic, but just starting dying of laughter in the middle of a sentence? Maybe a few chuckles at the Covenant, but just laugh at nothing? To the marines, one second he was mowing down grunts while giving orders to hold position, then he was randomly laughing while diving behind a Warthog and just sitting there snickering to himself.<p>

"Hey Chief...you alright there?" One of the braver marines asked over the gunfire. All he got in replay and something like a wave while chief continued to shake with laughter.

Had they missed something?

"Really Cortana? A dance mix?" Chief was still snickering to himself, but slowly regaining his control.

Cortana then huffed in his helmet, just as amused over his reaction as she was over her choice of music.

"You don't dance, I know, You've told me so many times before, Chief. But if I'd known this was all I needed to do to get you to break down in hysterics I would've looked this up sooner...Even though imagining those Elites dancing to Gangnam style was hilarious" Cortana said with a small giggle of her own.

"The video you put up did help." He added with a small chuckle, he had no clue why he found it so funny, but damn if it didn't life his mood.

Peeking out from behind the cover of the fallen Warthog, he gave a

exasperated sigh. As amazingly funny as that had been, he was sure he gave the marines he was trying to save a near heart attack with his sudden fit of laughter. He didn't Laugh aloud much, and it sounded odd even to him.

"Now really isn't the time to try and kill me with music, Cortana. The LZ needs to be cleared." The volley of shots panging off his makeshift cover accented his point.

"Don't try and act all serious now, you loved it. Plus you have all this useful help just sitting right there." Chief could practically feel her sarcasm over the last few words. The marines in question were halfway between shooting at the aliens and shooting Chief bewildered looks. It didn't help that only a few minutes ago Cortana had berated a Marine for not taking the mission seriously.

"Funny... I think you just ruined my reputation as a Spartan..." He tossed a plasma grenade over his shoulder while the last of the beat died from his internal speakers.

"No one said laugh." Cortana responded with a bit of humor. "Plus I think a few laughs every now and then would do you some real good, loosen you up a little."

Doing a quick combat roll away from the Warthog, He fired 3 Magnum shots. Two Grunts and a Jackal swiftly dropped to the floor, the last of the targets in the area.

"That's what the shooting range is for." He quipped while reloading his gun.

It had been a few days since he had given Cortana free rule of his music library, and she seemed to think that meant playing songs 24/7, save for when he was sleeping. Which even then he couldn't be sure she actually paused the music or keep going.

Standing up, he saw the Pelican making its decent on his position. At least now he would be able to sit down and shift through the playlist with Cortana without the marines thinking he was going insane. Well, anymore insane then normal he thought wryly with a roll of his eyes.

"Did you just roll your eyes at me?" Cortana said once he yanked the chip out. Chief ignored her for the moment, pulling off his helmet and setting it beside him.

"Well not exactly at you, more in your general area" He said while rolling out his shoulder and taking a seat. The pelican was empty save for himself, Cortana and the Pilot for now thankfully, so they could have the moment to themselves while the marines packed their gear.

"Well fine then Spartan, you pick the song" Cortana motioned to his helmet, which he put back on, and opened up a display on his helmet that showed all her files. There were millions. A little taken aback from the sheer number of songs, Chief ran a hand over his visor to hide his surprise.

"Uh... can we narrow this list down, maybe?" John watched the list shrink to something like a couple thousand, much more

manageable.

"There, all down to a single century, the 21st." Cortana appeared to be studying the tips of her holographic fingers, but Chief could tell by the way she was looking up from her lashes she wanted his approval.

"Why then?" he asked lightly, it seemed very specific to him.

"Why not?" Cortana answered just as light as he did, a smile on her face and a gleam in her eyes.

John just huffed, and began looking through the list tentatively. There was just way too many for him to pick a song at random, so he brought up the lyrics along with the song titles. Finding one that looked promising, he selected it, and watched as Cortana pulled up the same information.

"No looking up the lyrics" Chief pointed out to her playfully. She adopted a offended expression.

"I know how to listen to music, Chief." She said with a mock pout.

Before the song could start, A marine who was previously looking at him with a confused expression back by the 'hog called out to him.

"Hey Chief, you ok...uh sir?" The marine had stopped a few feet away, and was looking at chief with a mix of curiosity and trepidation. Looking past the marine, John could see a few more filtering into the cargo bay, all with the same look as the one standing in front of him.

Seeing where this was going, John turned on his internal Com

"_Yeah, You handle this"_

"What? Those are your Marines!"

"Your better with words then I am."

"How would I be better at explaining why YOU were laughing like a idio-"

"Uh...Sir?" The marine was still standing there, only now he was looking over his shoulder at one of his buddies for help.

_"idiot... Great, now their looking at us funny." _

"That's exactly why I'm asking you to deal with it."

"...You are the worst."

The other marines just shrugged their shoulders and motioned for him to try again, but the before the young marine could ask louder Cortana's voice sounded over the Master Chief's external speakers.

"It's a inside joke, boys" She said simply and finally, much to the

disappointment of the rest of the pelican's occupants.

"I could have said that, Cortana."

"Then why didn't you? Oh that's right, you didn't."

"Oh... what about? Seems pretty funny, if you don't mind me asking ma'am." The marine looked up at Chief with a hopeful expression, and his buddies on the other side of the pelican looked about the same.

"Don't you dare."

"Scared of a few Marines, Chief?"

"Scared of whatever you're going to say this time."

"I'll deflect, yank me."

Chief pulled Cortana's chip out of his helmet, and held her out to the marine. after a moment she shimmered into view, and Chief could practically feel all the other marines getting a few steps closer. Still holding her in his palm, Chief pulled off his helmet and set it down on the bench, all while leaning against the wall of the pelican.

Cortana looked back at Chief over her shoulder and sent him a purely mischievous smirk, and he suddenly felt a flash of regret over letting her handle this.

"What's your favorite song, marine? Oh and your name would be nice." If the Chief could toss he out a window, he would.

Giving Cortana his best 'how is this deflecting' glare Chief rolled his neck, trying to give the appearance of not caring about the conversation.

"James Stevens Ma'am and...Uh...that would be...I don't know ma'am" The marine said with a look between Cortana and the Chief, wondering where this was going just as much as John was.

"Little hard to pick right? How would you pick, with all the songs out there anyway I mean?" Cortana pressed on, putting a hand to her chin in thought. She looked over to Chie who in turn gave a half shrug, and they both turned back to Stevens who had been looking as if he were completely lost.

"Wouldn't It be a song that describes you!?" A marine on the other side of the pelican yelled over, other nodded and a few walked over to where their friend was standing near Chief.

"Or something you like, right Chief?" Stevens asked, while tilting his head to the side.

Another half shrug was all the Stevens got, and he looked back at the AI.

"Right, see me and the Chief here was just trying to figure out what his favorite song was, I think its Gangnam Style, but I think he disagrees." Cortana said all this with the calmest of voices, even if

the man in question was wishing he could sink through the floor of the pelican at this moment.

"_I hate you...just so much right now."_

"Um...really? Can't say I've heard that one ma'am..." Stevens said, and the other marines all seemed to not know it either.

The wave of relief that hit him was nearly enough to put a huge smile on his face, nearly.

"_looks like your luck is still running Chie-_"

"You mean this song, Chief?" the marines who had yelled before was holding a small device that began playing the song in question.

-ah... maybe not. What was that about you reputation again?"

She just HAD to say something, didn't she.

Before the song could even start Chief grabbed his helmet and shoved Cortana's chip into its slot, and almost sprinted to the farthest corner of the pelican, which just happened to be next to the pilot, who looked up at the Chief in question.

"What's our ETA?" John said through his teeth, trying his best to ignore Cortana's laughter in his helmet and the low beats of the song still playing with the marines.

"Should be there in a 3 minutes, sir." The pilot answered and turned back to his controls with a slight head tilt.

"_Just enough time for them to hear the whole song, isn't that lucky?" _Cortana quipped as he leaned his back against the wall behind the pilot.

_"Not another word, Cortana." _She answered with a burst of affection and her ringing laugh.

"_Oh come on, it's not that ba-_"

****AYEEEE SEXY LADY****

Cortana was interrupted by the one English line in the whole song, loud enough to make the pilot and Chief jump.

"HEY! What the hell!?" The Pilot yelled back to the marines who were currently half laughing and half utterly confused.

"Sorry sir. Just listening to the Chief's favorite song. I'll lower it!" Stevens answered in between bursts of laughter.

At that the pilot turned back to Chief and gave him a long stare before turning around and not saying a thing.

-...at least you made them laugh?"

John had been cringing this whole time in his suit, and before answering he took a few slow, calming breaths.

"I can hear that."

After a few more moments of song and the laughs and snickers of the Marines, the pelican began to make its decent at the base.

"So...is it your favorite yet?"

John silently hit the mute button, and was satisfied by the wave of indignation he felt from Cortana.

In the Silence that followed, Chief and Cortana could hear the marines talking to each other about the song and Chief's sudden departure.

"Did you see how fast he ran out of here?"

"That had to be the funniest thing I've seen all tour man!"

"Yeah, and this song, dude, funny as hell."

The Pelican landed, and the Marines started to grab their gear while heading out.

"I wonder what Cortana's favorite song is, right?" Stevens said while grabbing his pack and slinging it over his shoulder.

"Man she can't have a favorite song, she not a real person."

"Yeah, she's just a computer, when was the last time your computer asked you to play it's favorite band?"

"It's not as if she can actually feel anything anyway."

"Yeah I guess..." Stevens answered, while throwing a glance at Chief and Cortana's spot.

If Chief could go out and punch those marines over the complete sadness he felt from Cortana he would.

The pelican's ramp opened al the marines began filtering out. Stevens gave the Chief a salute before jogging off to catch his squad.

"Okay, everyone out, last stop." The pilot called while getting out of his seat, he gave the Chief a glace, who hadn't moved from his spot, and continued down the ramp with the rest of the marines.

Not really knowing what to do to help the situation, John tentatively un-muted Cortana, who surprisingly didn't have anything to say. He walked over to the benches where he had been previously sitting, and waited. After a few more moments of the uneasy silence John spoke up, hoping to make her focus on something else.

"Hey, let's play that song I was going to show you." John said, while pulling off his helmet and popping out Cortana's Chip. she shimmered into view, her face oddly blank, and nodded at him.

"Okay chief, whatever you want." The way she said it just didn't sit right with him, and he had a idea. Quickly he looked for another

song, one he had seen before but had deemed it would be better for a different time. Now was as good a time as any he thought, as he selected it.

"Wait... here, changed my mind."

"Oh, now your picky..." Cortana said with a slight frown as she switched the song. John just looked at her silently, giving her a small shrug.

The dawn is breaking, a light shining through. You're barely waking, and I'm tangled up in you...

Scanning the lyrics quickly, she looked up at him with confusion, before a slight grin appeared on her face.

_I'm open, you're closed, where I follow, you'll go. I worry I won't see your face, light up again... _

"Trying to cheer me up, Chief?" Cortana asked with that same grin on her face, John couldn't help but want to return it.

Even the best fall down sometimes, even the wrong words seem to rhyme. Out of the doubt that fills my mind, I somehow find you and I collide...

John looked away, out toward the exit of the pelican, and tipped his head slightly toward Cortana.

"Well you know, what you can't say with words..." He glanced at her and gave a small smile.

I'm quiet you know, you make a first impression. I've found I'm scared to know, I'm always on your mind...

Cortana smiled back at him with a gleam in her holographic eyes and followed his line of sight as he turned back to the exit.

"What you can't say with words..." she said with a light voice and quieted, listening to the rest of the song together in silence.

Even the best fall down sometimes, even the stars refuse to shine. Out of the back you fall in time, I somehow find you and I collide...

* * *

><p>TheFlamingBlade, thanks, I was thinking some of those XD
_

3. Fade into War

Hey, Chap 3 is a go. Hope everyone had a good holiday (and if you don't celebrate, a good day regardless!)

Song(s) for this chapter is Street Fighter (War) by Sick Puppies, and Fade Into Darkness by Avicii (thanks TheFlamingBlade)

A million thanks for reading! ~Jaz

* * *

><p>"The enemy has captured Captain Keyes, and are holding him aboard one of their cruisers, the Truth and Reconciliation. The ship is currently holding position approximately three hundred meters above the other end of this plateau."<p>

"So how do we get inside the ship if it's in the air? The Corps issued me a rifle, not wings."

"There's a Gravity Lift that ferries troops and supplies between the ship and the surface. That's our ticket in."

"Now would be a good time for battle music, don't you think Chief?"

The man in question rolled his eyes, of course Cortana would use any excuse to play with his speakers. She had been playing nice slow melodies for the last few hours, and while it was nice and very calming, given their current situation she felt like they could use a change in atmosphere.

"Your timing is perfect as always..." Chief wouldn't lie, he was starting to like Cortana's addiction to music. Aside from the event in the pelican a few weeks ago he normally found her music very useful.

"No dance mixes right?" Cortana asked while cycling through her playlist, he could practically feel her smirking at him.

"Not now." As long as he never sees those marines again he wouldn't mind her teasing.

Cortana sent him a burst of warmth and switched to his external speakers to address the crowd of soldiers and Parker waiting for the pelican to land.

"Once we get inside the ship, I should be able to lock on to the tracking signal from Captain Keyes' neural implants." All business, none of the playful tones she used with him, he thought to himself as he listened to the chatter.

"So what's up for today, Cortana?" Chief asked, all while checking his sniper rifle's ammo. He was hoping something a little more... loud, then before.

As the beat for the song started up, John couldn't help but give a slight grin inside his helmet.

"Hit it Marines, go go go! The Corps ain't payin' us by the hour!" Sergeant Parker blared at his Marines, oblivious to the music playing in Chief's helmet.

_Let's do this!
>

"Well... this certainly isn't sniping music." Cortana ignored John's remark and addressed the rest of the marines. While she

talked, Chief lined up his shots while creeping forward.

"Stick to the higher ground on the right. We should be able to recon the Covenant position without being spotted-

_Faking falls, Stop and stall, take it all. Fact is I'm taking mine, I'm taking mine... _

-I'm detecting Covenant Stationary Guns near the next pass. I recommend using your Sniper Rifle to take out the gunners while I call for Marine support." Cortana was unfazed by the music, but the volume was enough to drown out some of her words from John.

Time is up out of luck, Should've stood up when you had the time, But you're out of time...

"Get ready to move in to support us, Sergeant. John-117 is going to covertly take out as many of the Covenant as he can. Don't open fire until you hear the enemy return fire on us. That should let us keep the element of surprise."

_Let's do this fight, fight, fight. Lock and load, Rock and roll...

>

8 Shoots, more than enough for the covenant he was counting in his view.

Bitch it's all over , you're going down. You're going down...

Stationary gunner first, and with a quick shot he was down.

_Get ready to settle the score, and get ready to face the floor...
_

Swinging the rifle around to his next target, Chief buried a bullet into the back of a sitting grunt's head.

Cause it's time to remember it, War...

Chief tilts his rifle as he takes out a grunt that had just looked up at the sound of the sniper, and scans for the jackal he had seen moving near a large boulder.

This is war, and it's on tonight. So get up and fight, get up and fight...

Reloading quickly, Chief spotted the jackal in between two rocks, and before he was even finished reloading had his crosshairs on its head. One shot and it was down.

You had all your life, to run and hide. Now step up, now step up...

A elite and a jackal had come into view and Chief decided on taking the jackal first. A shot to its back while it turned was all that was needed.

Let's do this...

The elite seemed surprised, and pulled out its gun before Chief could drop its shields.

Sat around , Going down

Shooting at its stomach, Chief rolled out of the elite's line of sight, and before coming to a stop he lined up a shot with it's head and fired.

How about a little reaction, man, you can barely stand...

John reloaded while creeping forward, and without aiming down the sights he took out another grunt who had been panicking.

"_Well this is entertaining..." _ Cortana murmured from inside his helmet. Before he could question her he spotted a grunt standing on the ridge. Reloading, he lined up his shot and counted the next targets.

Bitch slap, slow attack. Man, that was practically suicide, next in line...

Grunt down, and he slowly moved his rifle over to the elite he had spotted.

Go! Fight, fight, fight...

Squeezing off his first shot to get its shields down, he pulled the trigger and was already lining up a shot on the farthest grunt.

Get ready to settle the score, and get ready to face the floor...

Downing him quickly, the Chief saw his marines begin to move towards his position. He jumped down from his sniping perch, and made his way into the kill-zone.

Cause it's time to remember it, War...

"_And you say you don't dance." _Cortana said with a flicker of humor and satisfaction.

"What-"

"Elite incoming!"

_"Got him." _

The elite didn't even have time to raise his weapon before Chief had grabbed a fallen plasma pistol and sidestep into cover. Tossing a grenade at the small crowd of enemies, he waited for the rest of the group to get to his position.

This is war, and it's on tonight. So get up and fight, get up and fight...

The Marines and Master Chief made quick work of the group, slowly advancing up the slope to their destination with him taking point. While switching to his newly acquired pistol he noticed movement out

of the corner of his eye.

"Elit-" Cortana was cut off by a elite slamming into John, and they both went down hard on the floor.

'Cause we're all about ready to break, and we're all about ready to break . Yeah we're all about ready to break, yeah we're all about ready to break...

Shoving his elbow into the elite's neck, Chief pushed back its snapping jaws and reached for his fallen pistol. Grabbing it, he swung back and rammed the gun into the elite's neck, pulling the trigger to drop its shields.

This is war, And it never ends...

Using the moment of shock to roll to the side, he placed a foot on the elites neck, forcing the elite to stay down as he got to his feet. The elite made a blind grab and latched onto the foot on its neck, and began tug him off balance. Leaning over the elite, he pressed the gun to the back of the elite's head and fired in time with the last words of the song.

So get up, get up, get up, get up...

As the marines and Parker looked on, Chief discarded the pistol silently and pulled out his rifle. Looking at them, he made a motion for them to continue up the slope, and he glanced back down at the elite.

_"You almost gave me a heart attack, you know." _

"_Is that concern I'm hearing, Cortana?"_ Kicking the elite's limp hand from his foot, Chief started up the hill after the rest of the team.

"Well, you do like to cut it a little close."

"_Just making sure you don't get bored of me._____"_

"Never." Chief felt and heard a bit of affection with her words.

Smirking, he headed up the hill and began to clean up the rest of the covenant the marines were engaging.

* * *

><p>"We must be in the brig, these look like holding cells. There are probably multiple detention stations, the Captain must be in one of them. We need to keep looking for him." Cortana said aloud, John just nodded his head and continued walking forward.<p>

"You ever think you'll need rescuing like this someday?" Cortana asked while the Chief sniped a few grunts out of his way.

"Spartans don't need rescuing, we get ourselves out of messes. You on the other hand well..." Chief let his sentence die off with a few shots from his needler into the back of a elite.

"Did you just refer to me as a damsel in distress?" John waited for his shields to recharge while he listened to Cortana fume at him.

"Well if the shoe fits, right?" leaning out, he fired a few more shots at the elite, downing it. He knew Cortana would be glaring a hole through his head if she could, but poking fun at her was one of the few highlights of his missions.

"I'm going to remember that next time you're in Cryo. Maybe leave you in there a extra couple years." Cortana said without venom, and paused the little piano solo they'd been listening to.

"You couldn't go that long without me, you'd go crazy within a week." John stated, while walking down the corridor, he should be finding the Captain soon.

"There's plenty more people to talk to besides you, John. It would be so relaxing, without trying to kill yourself daily." Cortana replied lightly frustrated. She was going over her playlist and couldn't seem to pick a song, John noted. Her irritation was almost funny, he could imagine her pouting at the screen while shifting through songs.

"Well that would just be boring. Plus, none of them are your Spartan, right?" Picking a song from his playlist, he put it to play and started off down the hall while Cortana huffed.

"Right, none of them are my Spartan." Cortana let a bit of her possessiveness leak into her words, and strangely John didn't find that he minded.

Looking up there's always sky, Rest your head I'll take you high...

"It's the Chief!"

"Chief! Chief! Let me out, man!"

We won't fade into darkness, won't let you fade into darkness

"Looks like we found 'em, easier then I would have thought."

"Watch out Chief, the Covenant guards are using some sort of stealth armor." Captain Keys called out from his cell, and Chief couldn't help but roll his eyes at that.

"You always have to say something..."

Why worry now, You'll be safe...

"Understood." Shifting into a crouch, he quickly disengaged the visible enemies, all the while looking for these 'cloaked' guards.

Hold my hand, just in case, And we won't fade into darkness...

Seeing the blue of a energy sword and nothing else, Chief fired and lucky saw the shimmer of a shield dropping. moving behind a pillar, the last words from the song gave the Chief a idea.

"_Can you kill the lights?"_

Fade into darkness, no we won't fade into darkness

_"Yes...Why?" _

"Just trust me, you'll like this."

Fade into darkness, fade into darkness...

_"Trying to kill yourself twice in one day? Overachiever." _Cutting the lights as asked, Cortana gave chief the all clear and he stepped out into the now dark room. She keep a very close eye on his radar, he noted with a small huff of laughter.

"Master Chief?" Keyes's voice and the voices of the marines called out questioningly.

Fade into darkness, fade into darkness, fade into darkness...

The blue of the energy swords lit up the points of the room they were in, there was only two, reflecting off the elites holding them.

Stepping out Chief rushed the closest elite and blocked its swing with his rifle. grabbing hold of where he thought its arm was, he twisted its arm so its own sword jammed into its neck. It went limp and dropped its weapon, allowing chief to pick it up and hold the body as cover. Twisting its body around, he used it to block a hit from the other elite, its sword lodged into its fallen comrades body.

Using the body as a grip, Chief pulled the body down and towards him, with a quick swipe upwards with the sword he was holding he sliced clean into the second elite. Its blood splattered on his armor as it fell to the floor, the elite's body coming into view as its camo died. John jabbed to sword into its neck once for good measure, then stood and looked around.

_"Clever...fighting in the dark, a new way to give me a heart attack." _Cortana remarked as she brought the lights back online.

And we won't fade into darkness, Fade into darkness. No we won't fade into darkness...

_"Well I might have had some help on this one. I'm sure I'll find a few more ways." _Chief answered lightly, he couldn't keep the smugness out of his voice however.

"Good work, Chief." Keyes stated, grabbing John and Cortana's Attention. Chief nodded to him, and the enthusiastic marines in their cells.

This world can seem cold and gray, but you and I are here today...

"That was amazing, sir, you really kicked the shiâ€"

"Stow it, Corporal! Chief, open these cells, and let's get the hell out of here. The power control's along the back wall, although I am impressed Chief, didn't think we were getting out of here."

And we won't fade into darkness, fade into darkness...

"Well, John is my Spartan." Cortana answered coyly with Chief's speakers while he went to the controls. John tilted his head at Cortana's statement, and after hitting the controls he tapped the back of his helmet.

Nothing to fear but fear itself, we'll be ok just keep the faith...

"_When did you start calling me John?" _He asked out of curiosity. Not that he minded, but no one used his actual name with him. Cortana was probably one of the few people who knew it, or knew him enough to call him by it.

And we won't fade into darkness...

"_When you became my Spartan...that alright?"_

Listening to the ending of the song, John didn't answer right away, but he put the song on repeat, and hummed to himself for a second.

"_As long as I'm your Spartan I'll never mind." _John moved to join Keyes, but Cortana's sense of relief was almost crushing.

_"So I'll never be bored again then, huh John?" _He laughed silently to himself while he approached Keyes, who was waiting for him.

"As long as you keep letting me find ways give you heart attacks."

Cortana's following laugh echoed off the walls of his helmet, and accented the music nicely.

4. For You, I will

Hey! Sorry for the wait, life decided to pummel me.

Anyway, the Song(s) for this Chapter are Take Me Back, by Story of The Year And For You I Will, by Teddy Geiger.

Thanks for reading! -Jaz

* * *

><p>The Chief had a headache, and the marines were not helping.<p>

"Listening to anything interesting there, Chief?"

Stevens called out to Chief while was packing his gear; Chief noted

that he was a bit clumsy. Occasionally the marine would drop something , earning him a few jeers from his squad. The base they were stationed in for now was temporary, and thus needed a lot of help from Cortana to run. Currently she was off doing something techy with the Captain, leaving Chief to watch the marines while they prepared for a mission in a few hours.

Cortana has found it endlessly amusing that Chief had the job, she kept insisting him that the marines could use better training, or a brain. John just replied that she was too used to seeing himself, the super Spartan, on missions and forgot what being around normal soldiers was like. He was sure that if she had the ability, she would have smacked him upside the head for that.

At least he could listen to the playlist while watching the marines run around. The only marines that seemed to be paying him any attention was Stevens, who was currently carrying a load of grenades to a warthog.

It wasn't until Chief causally threw back a grenade he had dropped that Chief began to seriously doubt the training program the UNSC put their marines through. Stevens had managed to miss the grenade complete, while dropping everything that he was holding, then kicked it into a moving scorpion's treads while chasing after it.

The explosion, the panic after that, the checking for injuries, and the near fight that broke out over whose fault it was left Chief with a even bigger migraine then before, and a healthy case of doubt over who was watching his back in the field.

Stevens jogged over to Chief after the whole fiasco, about to ask Chief his opinion on the whole thing probably. Before the marine could even speak, John raised his hand and pointed to his visor, then made a shooing motion with his hand. Stevens nodded somewhat glumly, and trotted off.

_"I'm getting reports of a 'accidental explosion' near you. What did you do this time?" _

Pausing the song he hadn't even been paying any mind to, he let out a small groan of annoyance.

_"Nothing. The marines just wanted to see what a grenade explosion looks like up close." _

"Oh someone's grumpy, didn't get enough sleep?"

He wouldn't admit it to her, but her attitude always put him in a better mood then before. Even if she was the reason he didn't get his sleep.

"You know exactly how much sleep I got, probably the reason my head feels like imploding right now"

"That's not because of the marines? How bad are they today hm?"

"I have never faked a call to get out of talking to one of them before, I'll say that."

"I'll get you out of your death sentence before you cause another explosion."

"That wasn't my fault, but is that a promise?"

His visor pinged, and revealed that he was now 'stationed' in his quarters till the mission.

"Promise."

"I'm not even going to ask what dark magic you just preformed to get me out of babysitting, but I love you for it." John said quickly while nearly running to his temporary quarters. If he had a guardian angel, her name was Cortana.

_"Just that? I'll have to try harder then." _

Chief could normal tell when Cortana was kidding, but her voice lacked that playful tone that normally accompanied it. That and the fact that she took a little longer to answer then she normally would...

John started walking again, deciding he first needed to get his armor off so he could rest a bit, then think.

Right, objective one, armor, quarters first. Then sleep.. Definitely sleep_._

Allowing a single chuckle over how even in his head he sounded like a soldier, John made his way to his quarters with a brisk walk, and allowed himself to lean on the back of the door after he had shut it a moment longer then he needed to.

Pushing off the door, Chief moved to pull his armor off but then thought better of it. Being as he wasn't even supposed to be here, if he had to leave quickly it would be that much harder to do so without his armor on. Sighing to himself chief stretched, brushing his hands on the top of the ceiling.

Observing his quarters, Chief noted that while it was temporary, the quarters looked much like his ones at any other base. Cot, table, Cortana's pedestal, all the necessitates, though he only really had eyes for the bed right now.

John was sure he was the only Spartan who would consider sleeping with his combat armor on for the sake of convenience, but he was probably the only one with a AI who redirected his orders for him too.

Fuck it, not like it's the weirdest thing I've done. And I'm tired. Very tired.

Climbing into the cot, which he noted looked so wrong through the off visor for some reason, John slowly moved onto his back and tried to get comfortable. Maybe if he put his arm under his head...

Sighing, he figured he was comfortable enough, he stretched and settled down for a nice nap.

bringing up the playlist, John scrolled down to the song he had

paused earlier, and shut his eyes while the music started.

Cortana had been in John's quarters for about 5 minutes waiting to see if he would wake up. Her glow alone should have woken him, but it seems her Spartan was down for the count. And sleep in his armor, which is NOT what she meant by relax.

Aside from that, he also had a song on repeat, sounding through his speakers and at enough volume that anyone walking by his door would hear it. And yet, he was snoring right through it.

Do you still remember back when, the days were longer? Dreams were bigger then, the weight of the world had not yet landed on the shoulders of a man...

Tilting her head to the music, she wondered if only listened to songs that reminded him of himself, or if he just picked songs at random.

I thought, I thought that time stood still, sheltered, protected. They never told me this would end or that the leaves would fall again...

On second thought, he definitely picked ones relating to him. Trying to figure out a way to wake him up would be a challenge, she didn't exactly have the ability to do so without putting him into full attack mode. If she's learned anything from working with John, it's don't put him on alert unless he has something to mutilate.

_So take me back, back to better days, 'cause this time between is wasting me away. Take me back when we were not afraid 'cause this time between is wasting me away... _

Cortana wondered lightly if he ever missed the other Spartans. He had friends before, hadn't he? Feeling a pang of sadness over the losses he'd suffered, she brought up the message she was meant to deliver to him. She could tell him this herself on the mission...

There was a day when this world went to war and didn't bat an eye. Real life and the movies felt the same to me and I never questioned why...

For some reason, those words bothered her. Something about them irritated her to no end, and without putting much thought into her actions, she stopped the song.

"Cortana? What is it?"

Damn. That's all she needed to do?

John instinctively reached for his gun, that he had put up against the end of the bed. He was looking around quickly, going from asleep to fully awake in less than ten seconds.

"No need for that John, just came to deliver a message." Cortana said in her most soothing voice, hoping to get him to relax before he started putting holes through the walls.

"What about? Couldn't wait?"

Cortana in turn looked back at the message, opening it for him to see.

"Oh you know, probably something incredibly useless and not helpful in anyway." Cortana said with a smirk, placing her hands behind her back.

"The message or the marines?" John answered just as snarky, while scrolling down the text with flick of his hand.

She continued to stare at him, the same thought bouncing around her matrix as it had been all day.

What exactly are we, John? Cortana wanted to ask, but didn't quite know how to word it.

John glanced over to her after noticing her silence. Even if she was just a hologram, he could see her biting her lip and nearly boring a hole through his head. Raising his eyebrows, John turned from the message and regarded her.

"Something you're not telling me, Cortana?" he question while tapping her pedestal with his foot.

The question shook her out of her thoughts, and she looked back at him without any of the doubt she was currently shifting through. She had thought all of this maybe a second longer then she need to, and now John was looking at her with concern lighting his eyes.

"Just thinking about statistics.." shrugging her holographic shoulders, she gave him a small smile. John seemed to accept this answer, and went back to the message, his eyebrows slightly pinched.

It was odd, what she had been thinking, she didn't normal dwell on how she felt about people. They were easy to categorize after all. Dr. Halsey was her creator... The UNSC was her core, what she had been created to protect and serve...And then there was John.

She didn't miss the concerned looks he was shooting her while he read. Or the way his hand kept hovering near her pedestal, as if wanting to touch it but unsure.

Shaking herself from all the thoughts swirling through her matrix, she couldn't categorize John into anything she knows. It bothered her, but she'd never been one to have a long attention span for her own random thoughts, so she decided to ask him instead.

"What am I to you, John?" She asked suddenly, giving him her most serious look. She couldn't place it, so she wanted to see if he could, worth a shot right?

"You...? Your my Cortana." John looked at her while saying his words slowly, as if she had forgotten who she was.

"Yes, I know that smartass. I meant, are we..?" She didn't have the right words to say anything more, she hoped he would.

"I think we've already established that, with me being your Spartan and all." John said finally, after looking at her for the longest

time. He said his words carefully, as if he wasn't sure himself.

"You don't actually know do you?" Cortana let her shoulders drop a fraction, and went back to shifting through the encrypted data on the message. She needed to distract herself from...whatever this was.

John managed to look surprised even through his helmet, and leaned his arms onto her pedestal so he was right in front of her. She looked at him curious, while pausing what she was doing.

"Hey... I promise I'll figure it out ok? I just don't have the right word...right now. " It sounded like the most sincere thing he had ever said to her, and she was hard pressed not to wish she had arms to hug him with.

Before she could replay, the Captain pinged her. Sighing internally, she gave John a half smile.

"Rain check on that promise, the Captain needs me to save him from the evil forces of security codes." She said while closing his message and un-pausing his music.

So now we're running, we're running blind into the light, and we fall behind. We're running and wasting away with time...

John nodded to her and stood up straight tilting his head at her before she left

"I want an answer from you, too." He said while leaning back against the wall. She gave him one mock salute before she blinked out of his quarters, leaving him alone.

While the Captain was giving orders to his troops and checking with the techs on their status, Cortana was utterly bored.

Leaving John to himself while she sat and did basically nothing with the Captain was right at the top of her list of things that annoyed her endlessly. That and marines blowing up computers, they do that sometimes.

Captain Keyes wanted her on hand for now in case something went wrong, something Cortana had to grudgingly admit was probably going to happen. She would have given anything to stay and piece out an answer with John, but duty calls she supposed. Either way, she hoped he'd gone back to sleep for now. If the answer is half as hard to find as it is for her he'd be thinking for weeks.

Speak of the devil, she thought to herself as her thoughts were interrupted with a message from the Master Chief himself, titled Rain Check.

Reading it, and noticing the sound file attached to it, she put the song to play while muting her speakers, just so only she could hear it. She read along with the lyrics, and happy smile forming on her not-really-there lips.

I'm wandering the streets, in a world underneath it all. But nothing seems to be, nothing tastes as sweet as what I can't have.

Like you and the way that you're twisting your hair, round your finger. Tonight I'm not afraid to tell you what I feel about you.

Oh I'm gonna muster every ounce of confidence I have, and cannon ball into the water. I'm gonna muster every ounce of confidence I have, for you I will, for you I will.

Forgive me if I stutter from all of the clutter in my head, 'cause I could fall asleep in those eyes, like a water bed.

Do I seem familiar, I've crossed you in hallways a thousand times. No more camouflage I want to be exposed, and not be afraid to fall.

_Oh I'm gonna muster every ounce of confidence I have, and cannon ball into the water I'm gonna muster every ounce of confidence I have, for you I will. _

You always want what you can't have, but I've got to try. I'm gonna muster every ounce of confidence I have, for you I will.

For you I will, for you I will, for you...

It's not every day my Cortana asks me to word what she is to me, right? -John

5. Sooner or Later, I'll Talk

_Hey, chap 5 in inbound. Think I should make these longer? Oh, and if you find any grammatical errors let me know, I'm horrible at catching them. -Jaz
>

_The song(s) for this one are Castle Of Glass by Linkin Park, Sooner or Later by Breaking Benjamin, and In My Remains by Linkin Park (Chief loves him some Linkin Park, apparently)
>

Guardian of all that exists, Done. great song thanks :D

* * *

><p>"Echo 419, on approach. ETA six minutes."

John re-checked his ammo for the 3rd time in a row, all while looking around the cargo hold. He was still thinking about a conversation he had with Stevens hour or so before the start of the mission, and it was still bothering him.

"Man, I can't wait for the mission to start, we've been cooped up at base forever, I've been just dying to get out." One of the marines said suddenly, while playing with his magnum.

"Now every time you say that, we get shot. A lot." Stevens replied, while handing a squad mate a grenade.

"Come on, the Chief knows this'll be easy a hell. Just land, shoot up

the place, and do whatever the Captain says." The marine said while getting up, he headed over to the pilot while Stevens shook his head.

"And every time you say that things go to shit!"

The enthusiasm of the marines only bothered Chief further, and he leaned back heavily against the wall.

_"Something bothering you, Chief?" _

Cortana's voice held a note of worry, and John mentally chastised himself for letting her know something was wrong.

Thinking back he really shouldn't be thinking of it now. It was just a conversation with a fellow soldier. But, now that he thought about it, he wondered if he should be more worried about the things he's learned. Closing his eyes, he replayed the whole conversation in his head, trying to figure out what it was exactly that had him bothered hours after.

_Fly me up on a silver wing, Past the black where the sirens sing.
Warm me up in a nova's glow, and drop me down to the dream
below..._

"We lost a lot of the squad last time, Chief..." Stevens muttered, while standing next to Chief waiting for orders. John had rested, eaten, and returned to his post with the marines. He was feeling lighter after his talk with Cortana, and had decided to listen to a few bands he had bookmarked while on duty. Maybe his mood was noticeable because Stevens came over to talk to him almost immediately. Well, more Stevens talking and John letting out a few grunted replies while drowning him out with music.

'Cause I'm only a crack in this castle of glass, hardly anything there for you to see. For you to see...

"I'm... sorry to hear that, Stevens. They were good men. " Stevens looked up surprised, Chief noted that this must have been the first time he called him something other than 'marine' since knowing him. And by know, being as Stevens had told him nearly his entire life story from being from Austin Texas, his sister Kate, his tech specialist bother, his Dog Sam, John felt like he knew more about the marine then he ever thought he would.

Bring me home in a blinding dream, through the secrets that I have seen. Wash the sorrow from off my skin, and show me how to be whole again...

"Uh... Thanks, sir..." John nodded back, he was never good at consoling others, so he hoped the conversation would be over very soon now.

'Cause I'm only a crack in this castle of glass, hardly anything there for you to see...For you to see...

"It's just that, well the marines don't last long around here, with the Covenant and all..." Hoped in vain. Tilting his head slightly in Stevens direction, the marines took that as his queue to explain.

Cause I'm only a crack in this castle of glass, hardly anything else I need to be... I need to be...

"I mean, we go out, five or six of us with one Spartan, and maybe three or two make it back, why? I know we aren't nearly as good as Spartans but why send us at all? The ODSTs would be better, hell _two_ Spartans would be just fine."

I need to be...

Stevens didn't miss the way chief slightly flinched at the last sentence.

Cause I'm only a crack in this castle of glass, hardly anything there for you to see. For you to see, for you to see...

"I-I mean you're good on your own Chief, I'm sure that-"

"There are more marines then Spartans." John didn't like where this conversation was going, and he hated_, hated_, remembering that he was always the last one left.

Switching the song as it ended, he would love for the next song to drown out Stevens completely. As it started Chief glanced back at Stevens.

I want a normal life, just like a new born child. I am a lover hater, I am an instigator...

Stevens looked like he wanted to ask a question, but kept opening and shutting his mouth like he didn't know how to say it. Eventually, after a few failed attempts, he tried again.

You are an oversight, don't try to compromise. I'll learn to love to hate it, I am not integrated...

"Sir? How did, I mean if it doesn't bother you, how did they all die-"

Just call my name, you'll be okay. Your scream is burning through my veins...

"They didn't." John answered quickly, cutting Stevens off.

Sooner or later you're gonna hate it, go ahead and throw your life away...

"They...didn't Sir? But I thought most of them died on Reach..." Stevens looked up quickly, expecting the chief to be offended.

Driving me under, leaving me out there. Go ahead and throw your life away...

"Spartans never die, we're listed as MIA, right?" Chief nodded at Stevens again, maybe that would get him to drop the subject.

You're like an infantile, I knew it all the while...

Truthfully John couldn't account for all the other Spartans, he was sure a few were still around... then again, given the nature of the work they did there might be a few left... maybe he should-

"Still though Sir, you gotta wonder why they send us at all, if you can do everything yourself. We rarely even make it out."

I am an oversight, just like a parasite. Why am I so pathetic, I know you won't forget it...

"Your here, aren't you?" John turned and looked at Stevens, he hoped that he would catch the meaning behind his statement.

Sooner or later you're gonna hate it, go ahead and throw my life away...

Stevens surprised look soon turned to one of pride, and he grinned from ear to ear.

Driving me under, leaving me out there.

"Live to fight another day, right Chief?"

Go ahead and throw my life away...

Pausing the song, Chief allowed himself to have a small sad smile behind his helmet.

"Right."

John mentally sighed at least now he might get some silence. Not that he disliked Stevens, but-

"I wonder if Cortana thinks like that, given that she can die like us." Chief gave some grunted reply, and Stevens kept talking.

"Then again, she's not human so, I don't know if she can worry about anything. Or care...you think she cares about us? I mean she does look after us on the field and stuff." John was rolling his eyes in his helmet, if only you knew he thought.

"But she's not human you know? And a AI is just a copy, even a smart AI like her, so wouldn't the emotions be copies too? Sure she can be happy and stuff, but it's not the same as actually felling happy or sad, right?" John stiffened slightly, he knew that wasn't true... right? Cortana was all emotion to John, she went through all of them in every conversation they had. Those were real, weren't they?

"I...Don't think it's that simpl-" John was cut off by Stevens, who had seemed to go off on his own musings.

"And I guess she can't die like us exactly, but she can die, Sooner probably, cause of that short lifespan." Stevens stated while shooting a glance over at her pedestal.

Well, that certainly halted all thought for Chief right there. John turned fully facing Stevens and worked hard to control his voice

"Explain." Stevens looked back over at the Chief, confusion written all over his face.

"Well I'm not a scientist but my brother... Well he says Smart AIs are decommissioned after about 7 years... Something about some Rampancy thing they go through." Stevens said with a shrug, glancing back at Cortana's pedestal as if she would be there.

"Can...it be fixed?" John was sure, positive, that Dr. Halsey wouldn't let something like that happen to her Cortana, to his Cortana... but just in case, there had to be a way to fix it.

"I don't really know Chief... Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to worry you about it. She's your friend right?" Stevens look honestly apologetic, and even John could see he actually regretted bringing it up.

Chief debated with himself for a moment before going back to his original position. He couldn't even say that he and Cortana were friends, they were so much more... but how to say that, to anyone besides her?

"She's... closer to me than anyone I've ever known." John decided the truth was the best way to go with this one.

"And I shouldn't tell anyone that or you'll kill me, right?" Stevens answered, laughing to himself. Noticing the Chief hadn't seemed to get his joke, he let out a few nervous chuckles before scratching the back of his head.

"I...uh...Yeah so friends then... but don't worry about Cortana, Sir...I'm sure that she'll figure something out or...yeah" Stevens muttered at him, looking like he didn't know exactly what to say but not how to stop talking. John, mentally chuckling, decided to help him out.

"She is something, no one is better at breaking the UNSC's rules then her... now tell her I said that, and then I'll have to kill you." John said, carefully keeping his voice devoid of any humorous tones. Regardless Stevens got the joke and laughed a little, losing all of his embarrassed demeanor. They went back to looking over the hangar bay where the rest of the marines were finishing up preparations.

The silence that followed was not uncomfortable, and John ran through his thoughts on whatever Rampancy was...if it could be fixed...what Cortana's emotions were... Sighing, John was just about to start up his music again when Stevens piped up again.

"So are we friends then, Chief?"

"_Chief? John?"_

John blinked, and shook away the memories, for now.

"_Normal mission worries Cortana, its nothing." _

"_We both know I know you better than that. You never worry, at least not about the mission."_

_"Later." _

John's abrupt dismissal surprised Cortana, but only momentarily. She would figure out what was eating at her Spartan, but later, when she had the time. Switching to his external Speakers, she addressed the rest of the forces on the mission.

"The Covenant believe that what they call "the Silent Cartographer" is somewhere under this island. The Cartographer is a map room that will lead us to Halo's control center. The island has multiple structures and installations. One of them contains the map room."

"Pile out! Go, go, go!"

Sighing, John pulled up his rifle and walked out the hanger to join the assault.

The mission went...well... let's just say John nearly had to force Stevens back into the pelican with the few surviving marines. Going underground in the pelican had been one of the many worrying moments, and now trudging through a swamp, Chief was deciding he did not like how this mission went at all. At least he had Cortana for company, and her amazingly annoying song choices for him.

"You're the strangest person I've ever known, Cortana." John dropped his hand to his side, and let out a exhausted sigh.

The song she was playing was from some remix he didn't care to learn the name of, and it was giving him a headache. It was ending, he thought, so he pulled up his playlist while it finished.

"But I'm not...not really anyway." Cortana, said lightly, nothing in her voice showed any emotion but humor. She had heard the conversation John and Stevens had, and while it did bother her, she thought she had done a good job of covering it up. Until now anyway. She always thought her emotions were real, despite being a highly advance AI. Now however, she questioned if she actually felt them or...

"Oh you are, right up there on the top of the list." John replied while going back to the his playlist, looking for the bands he was listening to before. He sleeted a song at random, and waited for her reply. She was taking longer than usual, and before he could ask is something was wrong, she spoke.

_Separate, sifting through the wreckage I can't concentrate.
Searching for a message..._

"That's not what I meant and you know it." She managed to cover up most of her sadness, but a little showed through in her voice.

In the fear and pain, broken down and waiting for the chance to feel alive...

John, just catching her meaning, almost stumbled in surprise.

Now in my remains, are promises that never came...

"You're as real as anyone I've ever met, and you know that." John said

with emphasis on the last word. But she'd never actually know what it's like to feel happy, not like he would. That and her damned expiration date... how could he understand?

Set the silence free, to wash away the worst of me...

"No, I'm not, I'm as real as any AI you've met. I'm...I'm programmed that way." She said, there was something in her voice that sounded...defeated. He didn't like it.

Come apart, falling in the cracks of every broken heart...

"You aren't like any AI I've met." John stated tentatively. He didn't want to get angry, he knew how to control himself but...why was she thinking like this now? After everything, she was questioning herself now?

Digging through the wreckage, of your disregard...

"How many have you met then, John? They can all be programmed to feel, you know. Doesn't mean its real." The venom in her voice surprised John, and he couldn't help but feel a wave of anger wash over him at it. How could she tell him that when she knew she was more real than anyone he had ever met. When she made him feel alive, how could she tell him she wasn't?

Sinking down and waiting for the chance to feel alive...

"If you're not real, then why do you care, about everything, about me?" He said with even more anger then her herself, and it stunned her.

Now in my remains, are promises that never came...

She didn't have time to answer as his radar blipped with hostels. John was silently thankful, now he had something to take his anger out on.

Set the silence free, to wash away the worst of me...

Stalking forward, he came across a few grunts and jackals. He was only slightly disappointed that it wasn't something more challenging.

Like an army, falling. One by one by one...

He didn't even bother with his gun, charging the first jackal from behind he grabbed its neck, and shoved his knife in as deep as it would go. Ripping the knife out, he dived behind a fallen tree.

Like an army, falling. One by one by one...

Letting his anger loose, he preceded to decimate the rest of the hostels with just his knife and well timed punches. He couldn't even explain why what she had said had angered him so, but this would help...he hoped.

Like an army, falling. One by one by one...

Cortana was silent the entire time, trying to formulate a answer for him. She couldn't understand why he was so furious with her... maybe he wasn't mad at her per say but more at...what exactly?

Like an army, falling. One by one by one...

"Well?" John asked coldly. After dispatching all the covenant in the area, he pulled out her chip and pulled out his helmet and was staring her down. His music was still playing from the speakers, it helped her focus.

Now in my remains, are promises that never came...

"I'm programmed to?" She said it more as a question, and immediately knew she was wrong. His eyes hardened, and the look he gave her spoke volumes.

Set the silence free, to wash away the worst of me...

"You weren't programmed to call me John, were you. Try again."

Like an army, falling. One by one by one...

"Well...I never said I was a normal AI, right?" Her normal humor fell flat, and he didn't react to what she said.

Like an army, falling. One by one by one...

"What's you real answer?" As the music died, so did her nerve... she looked down, staring at the ground beneath him. A far off gunshot echoed through the area, and she was reminded of the mission they were on.

_"I... Don't know. Do you?" _She hoped he question would sidetrack him, give her more time to formulate a answer for herself.

When he didn't reply, just continued to stare at her, she resolved to figure this out with him later.

"Put your helmet back on, we have a mission to complete." John finally reacted, silently replacing her into his helmet and shoving it back onto his head.

"We will talk about this."

Cortana could almost feel the command in that statement, and she knew she would dislike that conversation.

_"Later, you have things to shoot." _

6. This is Rain, Welcome

Hey! Jaz here, I wrote the the last part of this chapter while watching the VGAs... uggggh why do I do this to myself. Spike why do you do this!

Anyway, Disappointment aside the songs for this chapter are Rain by Breaking Benjamin, Welcome To The Masquerade by Thousand Foot Krutch (Thanks Jass!) and This Is War by 30 Seconds To Mars (Thanks

Guardian!)

Spoilers for the VGAs: ...Claptrap?! -facedesk- I love borderlands though, so don't kill me, but seriously... Clap...trap...

* * *

><p>She remembered him muttering once that he hated the rain, now in the swamp she could almost agree with him.<p>

"It makes things...difficult. To fight I mean, things are wet, they slip."

"That's not what I asked you John, I asked if you like the rain?"

"What's to like?"

"So no then? Interesting, you like the stars, but you hate the rain."

"How did you... Never mind, AI magic. But your wrong, I don't hate the rain."

"But you just said-"

"Tactically, It's a liability, like what I thought of you at first."

"You thought a super intelligent AI was a liability? You really are crazy."

"Next song." Cortana was shaken out of her thoughts by Chief's voice. It wasn't the abruptness of his request, but the flat tone of his voice that shook her. Without even checking she threw a song on, still thinking of a different time and place.

"Right...How's this?" Cortana asked timidly, while a slow beat started up. She knew what he liked, but he normally didn't mind her tastes.

"Too slow." John said, all while backing up to look up toward the massive fallen tree.

"What, really? Ok let me- careful!" Cortana yelped when John climbed up the foot of the tree. He slipped, dropping a clip for his pistol and nearly diving after it.

"Damn...everything's wet..." John said while standing carefully.

"Rain does that..." Cortana answered, lightly joking. John didn't laugh back, but she felt some of the tension lift, which to her was a good sign.

"Is it raining really? Hadn't noticed." John asked while glancing up, Cortana could see that his visor was speckled with droplets of water and knew he was lying.

"Since when does a Spartan miss something as obvious as

rain?"

"Since his AI pisses him off so much that he doesn't notice."

Cortana laughed out loud at that, catching the teasing tone in his voice.

"Well that brings back memories." She joked back, thinking back to another conversation that had in the rain.

"Does it now..." John crouched low on the tree, not spotting any enemies nearby. He crept forward, going slow as to not slip on the makeshift bridge.

"Oh definitely. Right down to soundtrack."

John stopped for a moment, then started moving again, as slowly as before but with a fluidness she hadn't noticed before.

"Remind me of it, with the song." John asked, his voice held something she couldn't place.

"You hate the rain." She answered carefully, not seeing where this was going. He had to remember it, after all. Regardless, she picked the same song that was playing then and put it to play.

Take a photograph, It'll be the last. Not a dollar or a crowd could ever keep me here...

"Why?"

Thinking back, he never actually said why, did he?

I don't have a past, I just have a chance. Not a family or honest plea remains to say...

"Thought we had established that? But aside from that, besides it being a liability, which you're not by the way, it's calming."

"So you like it?"

Rain, rain go away, come again another day. All the world is waiting for the sun...

"No wait...you don't hate the rain, its calming right?" Cortana amended. She remembered him being especially mysterious that day, and it annoyed her to no end.

"Right, remember what I said after that?" John asked while standing up, he had reached a part of the tree that was dryer than the rest, so he figured it was safe to walk normally.

Is it you I want, or just the notion of a heart to wrap around so I can find my way around...

"On occasion...It makes me think of you in a way."

"How so?"

Safe to say from here, Your getting closer now...

"It's sad."

Cortana always wondered what he meant by that, they're conversation had been interrupted by Captain Keyes and she'd never gotten to ask him.

We are never sad cause we are not allowed to be...

"You said it reminds you of me, because It's sad?"

"Tell me you're sad about not being human, and I'll tell you why it doesn't matter."

Rain, rain go away, come again another day. All the world is waiting for the sun...

Cortana wished she could feel the rain for him once, now she knew she felt it all the time.

"It matters John, to everyone, it does." Cortana answered quietly, letting her sadness drip into her voice.

Rain, rain go away, come again another day. All the world is waiting for the sun...

"Does it matter to you? Since when do you think of yourself as anything less?" John asked skeptically.

"I don't. You know that." The indignation in her voice was clear, and she did nothing to hide it.

To lie here under you, Is all that I could ever do. To lie here under you is all...

"Exactly, so why care about anything else." John said with the same tone as her.

Cortana could practically feel his smugness over proving his point.

To lie here under you, Is all that I could ever do. To lie here under you is all...

"I...guess I shouldn't then." Cortana said after a moment, her own mood lifting.

"Right, now I can stop being mad at you." John said while continuing his walk. Cortana laughed silently to herself after realizing this was all just to get her to feel better.

Rain, rain go away, come again another day. All the world is waiting for the sun...

_"You mad at me? Never." She said while mentally nudging him.

"Well, Don't pull the self deprecating thing again, that's my thing." John said with a smirk. Just as he was about to hop off the tree

bullets began slicing the air around him. He ducked, and sprinted into cover while readying his gun.

All the world is waiting for the sun, all the world is waiting for the sun...

"Not watching the radar, Cortana?" John said through gritted teeth. he leaned out of cover and fired a few shots, knocking off the shields of a few jackals and killing a few grunts.

"Yeah well, my Spartan was bothering me so I didn't notice." Cortana answered innocently.

John huffed, and rolled out of cover to engage the remaining enemies.

After defeating the few jackals, Chief climbed up the hill in front of him and was greeted by a clearing.

"So, I've seen you've made a friends with the marines." Cortana said conversationally. she was back to shifting through the playlist, looking for a song both he and herself would enjoy.

Taking cover behind a tree, chief leaned out to assess the area of any enemies. He saw none, but his radar said otherwise, it blipped with at least fifteen red dots just at the edge of the spectrum.

"Stevens?" Chief asked while going back to ducking behind the tree.

"Yep. What's his deal? Not replacing me are you?"

"Aside from the fact that the kid would most likely die in the first firefight solo with me, no, he's just the most talkative of the bunch." John said while switching to his pistol.

"I noticed that, think you Have a fan." Cortana knew John hated to draw attention to himself, aside from doing everything to win which lead to him being somewhat of a showoff.

"Ugh... I don't think he's like the other soldiers who think I'm some sort of god. He at least puts forth the effort of acknowledging me being human." Chief said with mild annoyance, if there was one thing he disliked, it was being looked to as anything other than a Spartan, winning is what they do.

"Tired of wearing your mask?"

"Tired of the masquerade we Spartans go through. We're just soldiers. Really good soldiers."

"Oh that reminds me of a song, and the ODSTs would have something to say about that." Cortana said while searching for the song, finding it, she put it to play. She figured John would like this one.

We've got the fire, who's got the matches. Take a look around at the sea of masks...

"The ODSTs...yeah let's leave them out of this. And good choice."

John said while preparing to jump from cover. The blips on his radar were converging in the clearing, and one stray dot caught his attention.

Come one come all, welcome to the grand ball, where the strong run for cover and the weak stand tall...

"Think you can get him?" Cortana asked lightly, pinging the stray.

I'm not one to scatter ashes, but there's some things that melt the plastic...

John grinned slightly while zoning in on the grunt.

Try and dig down deeper if you can...

"Give me a count."

I'm not afraid, I'm not ashamed, I'm not to blame, welcome to the masquerade...

"Three seconds until he moves, quarter turn to the right, 2 steps."

I'm not ashamed, I'm not afraid, I'm not okay...

John sprung from a tree he had moved behind and grabbed the grunt, digging his hand into its mask and pulling it forward until its head connected with his knee, stunning it. Pulling out his knife he finished it off with a clean jab to the base of its skull.

Welcome to the masquerade, welcome to the masquerade...

_"Next." _John spun around to hide behind the nearest tree, sure none of the other covenant had noticed their fallen.

We've got the power, who's got the action. Break it down till there's nothing but a mere fraction...

"Two jackals, seventeen steps to your left, heading northeast."

Out of the fire, rise from the ashes, reject your doubt and release the passion..

John waited until one of the Jackals moved behind a tree, and rushed forward. The first he surprised with a punch to the side, then grabbed its head and smashed it into a tree. Its shield fizzed with its death and the second Jackal raised its weapon at John.

Let's get on it, believe if you want it, step into the realm where the real ones flaunt it...

Using the tree as cover, John looped around and dived while making a grab for the jackal's foot. He twisted its ankle making the jackal fall to its knees. Taking advantage, John pulled the jackal toward him and with a trill of terror from the jackal, planted a swift kick to the back of its neck, killing it.

Come back, rewind, another time on it. Reach out, take that, but now step on it...

"You're especially brutal today I'm noticing. Something on your mind? Also grunt, ten o'clock."

I'm not one to scare the masses, but there's some things that melt the plastic...

"Maybe I'm always brutal. Think I can use this mist to my advantage?"

Try and dig down deeper if you can...

_"You know you will. Thicker in the trees then on the ground. No visibility thirteen point five feet out." _

I'm not afraid, I'm not ashamed...

"Perfect."

I'm not to blame , welcome to the masquerade...

John waited till the grunt was just within visible range, then skirted past him while sprinting.

I'm not ashamed , I'm not afraid...

"Demon!" The grunt screeched, all while panicking, just like John thought it would. He took cover behind some rock outcroppings, then rushed at another grunt who was on high alert.

I'm not okay, Welcome to the masquerade...

The grunt shot blindly, killing two others that had been behind the Chief in the mist. Smirking, John turned and threw his knife perfectly into the grunt's eye socket, killing it. He retrieved it, and turned scanning for his next target.

Welcome to the masquerade...

_"Clever, as always. Three jackals, closest twenty feet out, quarter right turn and you're on top of him." _

I'm not afraid, I'm not ashamed...

John sprinted at the jackal, and once he got to it, deftly kicked it in the side, then retreated toward the other two. The jackal recovered quickly, and fired its needler toward Chief and its comrades. John grabbed the nearest jackal and used it as a impromptu dart board for the incoming spikes. Tossing the dead jackal aside, he rolled out of the way of the fire from the third jackal's plasma pistol, and took off toward the first jackal who hadn't followed him.

I'm not to blame, welcome to the masquerade...

This time it was ready, and it quickly shot at John once he came into view. John zigzagged and glanced at his radar to make sure the other jackal had followed him.

I'm not ashamed, I'm not afraid, I'm not okay...

With a howl of pain from the jackal behind him, John sprang onto the first jackal, who had been frantically firing its clip into the mist and unknowing its comrade. The jackal made a swipe at John's visor, nearly hitting, but John grabbed its head and twisted, ceasing all movement from it. John stood and tossed his knife at the still breathing jackal, putting it out of its misery with a knife to the back.

Welcome to the masquerade, welcome to the masquerade...

"You've got incoming, one elite, twenty feet out and coming in fast. Six grunts about a hundred feet out."

Welcome to the masquerade...

_"Tell me when he's 5 feet out." _

I'm not one to scatter ashes, but there's some things that melt the plastic...

John bent to pick up his knife, seeming distracted. The Elite came into view and immediately rushed Chief, not bringing up it's weapon.

Try and dig down deeper if you can...

"_Now Chief."_

I'm not afraid, I'm not ashamed...

John turned and side stepped the elite's charge, while placing a kick to the back of its leg. The elite roared and turned, firing its weapon while staggering a bit. John dogged, and rolled into a crouching position.

I'm not to blame, welcome to the masquerade...

The elite pulled out a plasma grenade and John pulled out his knife, all while counting in his mind the seconds until the grunts came into play.

I'm not ashamed, I'm not afraid...

The elite threw his grenade, and John threw his knife at it with just enough force to send both it and the grenade spinning back at the elite. With a dull thud, the knife hit the elite squarely in the chest with the plasma grenade stuck to its handle, the surprised elite looked up at John with a expression of shock while John turned away to face the grunts. They had formed a perimeter around him and the elite, each standing directly across from another aimed at him. Perfect.

I'm not okay...

The explosion behind him caused the grunts to fire, and with specks of blood raining from the elite John hit the floor at just the right time.

Welcome to the masquerade...

Each grunt hit his teammate, making them all yelp in surprise and pain. Standing, John watched the wounded grunts all fall from shots from their comrades.

Welcome to the masquerade...

"No more hostiles. You know, they were really good shots." Cortana quipped while John retrieved his knife from what was left of the elite.

He laughed quietly while heading in the direction of the facility.

"Thirty Seconds to Mars? Predictable."

"What? I like them."

"Of course you do...This is war?"

"You just try and say that isn't a good song, Cortana."

Cortana digitally rolled her eyes, all while putting the song to play. They had made it through some of the facility, and while it did give her a uneasy feeling, it wasn't hard to get through.

"I'll just say your luck isn't as good as your tastes."

A warning to the people, The good and the evil...

"Someone doesn't listen to lyrics." John said jokingly while walking through a door. Movement caught his eye, and before he raised his gun a shot hit him.

_This is war. To the soldier, the civilian... _

"Stay back! Stay back, you're not turning me into one of those things!"

The martyr, the victim. This is war...

John jumped back, behind the doorway back into the hallway.

It's the moment of truth and the moment to lie...

"Is that a marine?" He asked Cortana while slowly leaning out to get a better look.

The moment to live and the moment to die...

The Marine was up against a wall, muttering to himself with his pistol pointed at the door. Cortana knew he was insane probably. Attacked by...something and left here to die it seems.

The moment to fight, the moment to fight...

"I don't think he's OK, Chief..." Cortana said cautiously.

To fight, to fight, to fight...

"Marine! This is Spartan 117 here to assist. Are you injured?" John called out to the marine while leaning out of cover. He turned down his music so it was just a whisper while the marine spoke.

To the right, to the left, we will fight to the death...

"Sarge? Mendoza? Bisenti? Oh, God... the things took them, oh God, I can still hear them...They're gone! Get it? GONE!" The marines shouted frantically, his screaming chilled something in Chief.

To the Edge of the Earth, It's a brave new world from the last to the first...

"What took them solider, was it covenant?" John stepped out slowly, holding his hands up. The marine looked at him fearfully, and began shaking his head.

To the right, to the left, we will fight to the death...

"Monsters..." The marine sobbed at him, clutching his gun to his chest and shaking his head pitifully. The sight hurt John's eyes, and he knelt down in front of the marine.

To the Edge of the Earth, It's a brave new world...

"What monsters marine? Are they still here?" The marine started at his words, clutching his gun painfully tight to his chest while looking around panicked.

It's a brave new world...

"They...they...took...played dead. That's what I did... played dead. They took the live ones... oh God, I can still hear them!" He whispered frantically at him while clawing at the blood he was covered in. Cortana guessed it was his squads.

A warning to the prophet...

"John...I don't think we can help this one..."

The liar, the honest...

"What happened to him..."

This is war...

"Something he most likely won't recover from, I think we should..."

To the leader, the pariah...

"What are you suggesting exactly?"

The victim, the messiah...

"We can't leave him like this..."

This is war...

_"You know me, I don't leave people behind." _

It's the moment of truth and the moment to lie...

"Marine, do you think you're safe here?" John asked while leaning forward. The path back to a extraction point should be clear, but if the marine could wait for him here...

The moment to live and the moment to die...

"They won't get me! Oh God... oh God I don't want to be like them, please, please no, nooo..." The marines began to move away from Chief, trying to get to a corner to huddle into. John grabbed the marines hand and took his gun away, setting it down beside him. While the marine clawed at Chief's gauntlet uselessly, Chief removed his helmet.

The moment to fight, the moment to fight...

"Hey, listen to me, listen." The marine looked at chief, eyes still frantically looking around the room. John snapped his fingers, and the marine focused on him, trembling slightly.

To fight, to fight, to fight...

"I'm...I'm listening..." The marine stuttered, still trembling.

To the right, to the left. We will fight to the death...

"Good, there is a way out of here, all clear for you. Do you think you can make it out alone?" John asked slowly, while pointing behind himself. Cortana was already writing up directions back for the marine.

To the edge of the earth, It's a brave new world from the last to the first...

"I-I can leave?" The marine asked shocked, while looking at the Chief to see if he was lying.

It's a brave new world...

"Yeah, you did good soldier. Made your squad proud." John replied, while standing and pulling the marine with him. The marine stood uncertainly, then looked to the Chief.

It's a brave new world...

"You'll kill them, those things?" John was putting back on his helmet, and Cortana was already displaying a map for the marine. He looked at it, shaken, but more solid then before.

It's a brave new world...

"It's a Promise."

I do believe in the light, raise your hands up to the sky, the fight is done...

Watching the marine turn to leave, John thought about his chances, if he were to run into any stray covies he missed...

The war is won, lift your hands, towards the sun...

"Wait!" The marine turn back to Chief, confused and scared.

Towards the sun, towards the sun, towards the sun...

"Here, It has full ammo... Just in case." Chief said while handing the marine his rifle. The marine took it, and stared at it for a second.

The war is won...

"Don't you need it...for those...things?...Spartan?" The marine asked his while John turned away.

John skipped over the song, fast forwarding it to a quieter part.

"Master Chief, and I'll be okay, Just get to the opening of the facility, there will be a pelican there in 5 minutes." John said after receiving confirmation from Cortana.

A brave new world, the war is won...

"OK, and sir?"

The war is won...

John turned to look at the marine, who was holding his rifle and standing a little taller than before.

A brave new world...

"Thank you... for not just shooting me. I...didn't want to die in this room, there's still some fight in me. It's...been an honor, you helping me." The marine ended with a salute, and turned, walking quickly out of the doors while they shut.

John closed his eyes for a moment, hoping the marine would make it to the pelican. He turned and walked toward the exit and up the ramp. He quietly began singing along to the rest of the song, while Cortana silently recorded it. He walked slower than normal, mulling over the last few minutes.

I believe in nothing, not the end and not the start...

I believe in nothing, not the earth and not the stars...

He wondered whether Cortana was originally right, if it was humane to just kill the marine rather than let him live with his monsters...

I believe in nothing, not the day and not the dark...

I believe in nothing, but the beating of our hearts...

For him, it seemed cruel for him to survive all that, then have

someone walk in and deem him unworthy of the chance to live another day...

I believe in nothing, one hundred suns until we part...

I believe in nothing, not in satan, not in god...

Maybe others would see it as pointless, the marine would probably run into something along the way, and the chances of him surviving that...

I believe in nothing, not in peace and not in war...

I believe in nothing, but the truth of who we are...

But for John, dying while on your feet and trying to survive was more of a soldier's death then anything he could think of. Maybe that was the Point, and he wouldn't leave anyone he knew he could help. as the song ended, Cortana spoke up.

"Think He'll make it?"

"I hope so."

"And if he doesn't, was it worth it?"

John steadied himself before activating a light bridge. Taking a step, he blew out a breath before answering.

"Yes."

"That's my Spartan. Now let's go get these monsters and show them what a real demon is."

John smiled to himself and picked up his pace, he would keep his promise to that marine.

7. It's Almost Over

_Hey! Sorry for the long wait... life ya know? Anyway huge time skip in this one and...stuffs! Thanks for reading!

>

_Songs are The War by Angels and Airwaves and Kings And Queens by 30 Seconds to Mars.

>

_Promise, no more million year waits. And if you catch any spelling mistakes let me know, its like 5 am and I am too tired to catch em.

>

* * *

><p>The ocean is on fire...

Gunshots, death, Orders, music.

The sky turned dark again...

Grande, targets, music, death.

As the boats came in...

Allies, music, death, enemies.

_And the beaches __stretched out with soldiers..._

Death, music, death, music, death, missing, lost, death,
death-

With their arms and guns It has just begun...

"CHIEF! LOOK OUT!"

John nearly flipped the warthog as he was driving as he spun the steering wheel, turning it violently it avoid the shots from the Brute Chopper.

The Marines in 'hog sprayed bullets at it, all while Chief executed evasive maneuvers from behind the wheel.

Shaking his head, John felt a breath of heat wash over him from a close plasma burst, but he wasn't calm. There was now cold breath in his head to calm him, no slight sharpness to keep him focused. He felt too hot, much too hot.

Believe, do you want this?

He was on earth, trying to get away from base. He had done so much...they had done so much... the halo rings, the prophets, the flood... him and her. Now it was just Him, and a few marines, trying to get to...where again? His head was killing him...

Believe, do I want this too?

He was there physically, but mentally... he wasn't so sure. Since destroying the halo ring, everything had been happening so fast he couldn't place to moment where it had all become so desperate. Every victory he had came with a price, and right now, it was less about winning and more about surviving.

Why won't you tell me that It's almost over?

That's why they made the choice, right? He had to, she said it. It'll be alright, he told her. I'll come back, it'll be fine. He promised her. And here he was, running around Earth trying to do something to fight the Covenant back while she was up there on High Charity giving him time to save everyone..or die blowing the rings and the ship she was on to ensure he did. It wasn't _right_.

Why must this Tear my head, inside out?

He knew he would get her back, soon if he could, but not having her here with him? It just felt so painfully _wrong_. He could fight and take orders just fine, but without her...he was missing how he got through it all. Shaking his head, John barley noticed the overjoyed whooping of the Marines as the chopper blew, or the disappointed groans as another showed itself immediately after.

_And the houses, laid__ out like targets..._

John knew he had a short time limit to stop the Convenient and rush to get Cortana back... he hoped nothing got to her before he did... John cursed as and volley of shots rocked the jeep, nearly catching the side of his head. He turned down his music so he could hear better, hoping that the sound of gunfire would clear his head.

With the deafening sound We watched them all go down...

Paying more attention now, John noticed red streaking his visor, marring his vision. With one hand and a growl of annoyance, he swiped at it and turned to check on the marine next to him in the passenger seat, a warning to be careful on his tongue.

_And the families, now__ useless bodies..._

Whatever he was going to say died in his throat as he look at the marine, his blood covering John's side and seat. The marine was gasping for breath, a wound in his neck gushing blood while he frantically tried to keep his hands over it. The marine behind him in the gunner seat still shooting, oblivious to the situation. John quickly turned ahead and found a place to stop the jeep while the sound of a Chopper exploding sounded behind him.

They lay still black and blue...

John jumped out and ran to the other side of the jeep, while the gunner just caught sight of squad mate. John grabbed the marine, and pulled him as easily as he could out of the jeep before setting him down against a tree.

A gift from us to you...

"Marine get me a med kit, now." John called over his shoulder to the gunner, all while applying pressure to the marine's neck. The marine was gasping for breath, frantically putting his hand over John's and trying to talk.

"Mast- Plea..." The marines gasped out his voice a mix of gasps and coughs. john could see now the marine was covered in wounds all over his chest...he was losing too much blood...

Believe, do you want this?

"I know, don't talk, try to breathe." John grabbed the biofoam the gunner handed him and was about to put it on the marines wound, when he stopped him. The marine pushed at chief hands and John was surprised at the strength in them.

The wounded marine looked at chief with a steel in his eye's that Chief hadn't seen before, and it froze him. "Save...not gon...make it... Finish... miss...on..." The Marine lifted his hand from John's and gave a weak salute, before letting them fall to the floor.

Believe, do I want this too?

John watched the marine squeeze his eyes shut, his body shuddering in

pain. John put his hand on the marine's shoulder as the gunner kneeled down and grabbed the marine's hand and squeezed.

"See you on the other side, Charlie..." the gunner whispered with a catch in his voice. John didn't move to look, just stayed with his eyes on the marine in front of him and the blood collecting on his hand.

_Why won't you tell me that It's almost over? _

They didn't move until Charlie had passed. It wasn't long, but it... it was one of the things that would stay with him...the look in the marine's eyes, there was a strength in them that held some familiarity to him.

"Permission to...stay sir?" The gunner asked John as he turned to walk back to the jeep. John felt lost, he had seen soldiers die, had seen fellow Spartan's die, but none had looked at him like that except...Sam...

Why must this Tear my head, inside out?

"...Why?" John looked to the gunner who was staring back at him. The question wasn't asked harshly, just to test the one asking.

"Because I want to protect him." The gunner said looking chief square in the eye. John nodded, satisfied with the answer. He climbed into the driver's seat and grabbed a gun, motioning the Marine over. He handed him it, while the marine took it he asked John a question.

Believe, do you want this too?...

"Sir...do you think...he was a good solider? He always wanted to be...always pushed himself..." The marine stopped talking and looked to chief expectantly, his eyes shining.

John started up the jeep, but before pulling out answered the marine.

"He would have made a good Spartan."

John drove off, trying to shake off the scene he had just left. Five Choppers came into view near an under pass, and he welcomed the distraction. Pausing his music and switching the song, he prepared to jumped out of the 'hog while a chopper screamed toward him.

_Into the night, desperate and broken. The sound of a fight, Father has spoken... _

Aiming with one hand, John fired off shots toward the driver when the chopper turned until he saw the brute go limp, then counted the seconds until his jump. The chopper flipped, rolling at the jeep sideways and nearly crushing John if not for him dodging while jumping away from the wreck.

We were the kings and queens of promise. We were the victims of ourselves...

John rolled with his jump, the sound of crushing metal and explosions

behind him. He stood quickly, and nearly sprinted to the chopper, its driver laying limply on its controls. the chopper looked to still be functional, if not for some smoke coming from the engine and a lot of dented metal.

Maybe the children of a lesser God. Between heaven and hell...heaven and hell...

Pulling the brute out, John noted another 'hog had shown up. It flew past him and at the other choppers, drawing their attention and allowing him to get into the brute vehicle.

_Into your eyes__, __hopeless and taken. __We stole our new lives, Through blood and pain..._

John punched to chopper into to full speed, heading straight toward the others. He spun up the guns, firing at the first chopper he got into range. It blew with a satisfying explosion and a hail of metal and brute parts. The other hog's gunner nearly started firing on him until he saw who was operating the brute's mount.

In defense of our dreams, In defense of our dreams...

As John drove past the 'hog to get to another target, he stole a glance at the gunner, he looked familiar somehow, though Chief couldn't place how. Guns firing re-focused him, and he turned back to the fight at hand. The 'hog fell into pace beside him, its gun pelting the opposing Covenant.

We were the kings and queens of promise. We were the victims of ourselves...

Chief signaled for it to cover him and loop around, while he raced ahead. He tore through one chopper, demolishing it and its driver as it turned to chase the 'hog. His chopper screeched in protest, its engine and frame shuddering with the impact.

Maybe the children of a lesser God. Between heaven and hell...

A Chopper to his right blew, sending more smoke and shrapnel into the air. The 'hog's driver beeped it's horn in excitement, and John could hear their calls from here. He scanned the area for the last Chopper, and found it behind a support under the overpass. Turning his vehicle, he drove straight for it as the 'hog pulled up beside him.

Heaven and hell...

They were almost to it, and John began firing his guns at the chopper, while the 'hog did the same. He could see the smoke start to rise from the chopper, and figured it only had a few more seconds until it blew.

The age of man is over...

Suddenly, the jeep Pulled away, nearly flipping in its attempt to bank. The driver Screamed something at Chief, but it was drowned out by a wrath's shot hitting the ground in front of John's chopper. The chopper buckled, and John was thrown from his seat as it blew into fiery metal parts.

A darkness comes and all...

John's vision blackened with his impact and the world seemed to blur. He tried to lift his head but a pressure made it pound with amazing force. he couldn't hear anything, save for muffled yelling and...music? His vision started to clear and...he saw blue... Cortana's blue. He squeezed his eyes shut while his music became sharper and skipped, repeating the last line.

_"These lessons that we've learned here...Have only just begun..."
_She sang to him, her eyes devoid of their light and her smile holding no warmth.

For a moment he felt an icy breath on his neck, in his head...his eyes snapped open.

He gripped his head in one hand, and blinked at the sunlight shining through his visor. He sat up quickly, feel none of the ill effect he had experienced a moment ago.

He has had flashes of her before, but none like this. He felt a new need course through him, one to get back to high charity as quickly as he was able. There was something _very _wrong with Cortana.

"Chief!" The 'hog drove up to him, slightly smoking and dented, but in one piece.

"Man, that was a bad hit, we thought- well doesn't matter. There's a wraith up there on the hill, didn't see it. We need help taking it out" The driver shouted while pointing to the wraith's position.

John nodded, and motioned for the 'hog to lead the way.

The gunner jumped down and walked over to Chief with an assault rifle, waving off his fellow marines.

"Damn Chief that was hard hit, you ok? Haven't seen you for a while." Stevens asked, while tilting his head and looking John over. John was surprised, he hadn't seen Stevens since coming back from the first Halo ring, and didn't think he meet the marine again.

"Fine, you Stevens?" John's voice betrayed none of his surprise, but he did shake the marines hand when offered

"Not a scratch yet. Anyway, figured you'd need a rifle to take down the wraith...and maybe a grenade, right?" Stevens handed John the weapons with a bright smile, which John took gratefully.

"Right, thanks. Cover me with the gun. I'll get the wraith." John was about to head back when Stevens called him back.

"Right-Wait! Where's Cortana, I heard-"

"She stayed behind." John cut him off, giving him the same answer he gave Johnson. Stevens looked down at the ground for a moment, his posture slouching a bit.

"Oh...well, you're gonna get her back right? I mean you and her were...um..." Stevens asked, his question dying off with his embarrassment.

"I made her a promise, I intend to keep it. No matter the cost" John said seriously while shouldering the assault rifle.

Stevens brightened and nodded, "That means messing up a lot of Covenant right?"

John nodded and turned to go up the hill, calling to Stevens over his shoulder.

"And anything else that gets in my way."

End
file.